



**Appropriations Committee
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Testimony

by

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On February 1, 2011, the CT Distance Learning Consortium launched the first online course offered inside a CT correctional facility, a pilot project initiated by the General Assembly. Currently, eight offenders at the Carl Robinson Correctional Institution are taking a Financial Literacy course taught by an instructor who is outside the institution. The course was chosen for its importance to re-entry planning and because it provides credit toward an adult high school diploma. The CTDLC worked with the Department of Correction, the Unified School District, and community groups such as the New Haven Re-entry Roundtable to choose an appropriate course, overcome the technological barriers, re-design the course to meet the DOC's security concerns and the needs of this specific population, as well as to recruit, hire, and train a mentor to provide technological support at the site, and hire and train a subject matter expert as the teacher. These were not insignificant barriers and we are grateful for the funding that made it happen.

While not part of the plan, the CTDLC has met with other state agencies and educational institutions concerned with financial literacy and made the course available to them at no cost.

This is an example of the work that the CTDLC does and can continue to do for the State of CT. We work outside the normal "boxes," create partnerships, and provide cost savings to the state in areas related to online education and training. We do this in several ways:

- 1) We centralize technology and expertise. This allows for educational institutions and state agencies to share a single data center, call center, and instructional and web design expertise;
- 2) We build it once and share it across the state as in our online courses offered through our Adult Virtual High School to all adult education programs in CT, or those offered to high school students through CT Virtual Learning;
- 3) We create unique collaborations across traditional boundaries such as our eTutoring collaboration which involves over 90 colleges and universities across the country and our grant funded Adult Success Center;
- 4) We negotiate with software vendors for contracts with steep discounts for the State;
- 5) We collaborate nationally with other consortia to ensure our members are current with issues such as new higher education regulations or accreditation concerns that affect online learning.

These activities support the goals of increased access and improved retention and graduation rates in both secondary and post-secondary education, as well as workforce training.



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And, it is important to note that we are an exporter. We bring in money from fees from out-of-state institutions including those we host in our data center, those we provide design services to, and the over 50 institutions outside CT that participate in eTutoring.

The State provides approximately 27% of our budget; the rest must be raised through fees for services and/or grants. Currently, those fees do not cover the total cost of the work that the state has asked us to undertake and we have used our reserves to co-invest in the Adult Virtual High School, CT Virtual Learning, and for the technology needed to support programs such as eTutoring. However, we cannot continue to do so, nor can we continue to raise fees to institutions and agencies that are facing their own budget cuts.

The cuts to our budget, however, are only a part of the story. Our work requires technology and hardware which had been supported previously through Capitol Equipment Purchase Funds (CEPF) dollars. Technology costs and the costs of technology security continue to rise, while the state's support through CEPF has all but disappeared. This presents a major challenge as we go forward.

At the same time, as the state moves to consolidate services, we believe that the CTDLC is in a unique position to enhance our work for the State. But, we require your help. Here are some examples:

- 1) As state agencies move their training online, they are looking for software to support their courses, and as state agencies, they need courseware that is accessible to all including those with disabilities. Several years ago, the CTDLC negotiated the first statewide single license for Learning Management System software to support the online courses at the CSU's, Community Colleges, and UConn. We are continuing to talk with this company about expanding this statewide to include K-12 and state agencies at considerable savings to all. This would be flexible and scalable allowing institutions and agencies to opt in when they are ready, but it would require a statewide commitment,
- 2) We are working in collaboration with the Community Colleges to offer training in teaching online in this software system. Should there be a statewide commitment, we are already poised to offer this online training across the state.
- 3) For the past nine years, the State Department of Education has funded CTDLC's Adult Virtual High School through a federal grant. This program provides online GED preparation and credit diploma courses to all of CT's adult education centers. These credit diploma courses have over a 60% completion rate, which is as good as or better than those offered face to face. Since its inception we have worked to incorporate courses that would prepare these adult students for college, specifically, by offering a math course designed to ensure that students have the math skills needed to place into credit level math at a community college. We are working with both commercial and open-source publishers to incorporate more of these types of materials into our



offerings. As the State looks to solutions to the problem of unprepared students entering college, we offer AVHS as one avenue for students.

4) Four years ago, the General Assembly funded the CTDLC to create CT's Virtual High School, with particular emphasis on credit recovery, AP courses, and world languages, to serve students in CT's high schools needing additional time to master their basic work, or to access courses their schools do not offer. We used those funds wisely in purchasing courseware, licenses, and technology, but the two-year funding became one, and now schools or parents must pay for these courses. That has become increasingly difficult as school budgets are reduced. Of more significance, the State has not made CT Virtual the preferred state solution. Currently, state dollars are going to commercial or out-of-state providers rather than to a solution designed by the CTDLC to meet CT's standards with CT certified teachers. We ask that the State look to CTDLC's VLC as the preferred solution to meet CT students' needs.

5) We provide web and instructional design development for a wide range of institutions, non-profits, and state agencies including the DEP, Dept of Public Safety, Dept of Public Health, the Workforce Investment Boards' STEM initiative, and SDE's highly successful Developing Tomorrow's Professionals program. Centralizing these functions in the CTDLC allows these agencies and institutions to buy only the staff expertise they need, and combine it with the support of our call center and technology expertise. Here again, we ask that the State look to us as the preferred provider of these services.

While the cuts to our budget are difficult, they can be offset by the State looking to us to provide these necessary services in ways that centralize expertise, build it once and share it, work across traditional boundaries, and create innovative collaborations that will save the State money.

Thank you.